

2006: RUSSIA'S VIEW ON THE NORTHEAST ASIA SECURITY LANDSCAPE - THE MONGOLIAN ASPECT

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The Northeast Asia (NEA) region is of great importance for Russia's foreign policy. The significance of the region for the Russian Federation may be represented as a characteristic of the following structural components:

Economic component

The Russian economy is expanding. This benefits its economic relations with many countries of East Asia. The key role in the trade and economic relations of the region with Russia obviously belongs to China. The Sino-Russian trade turnover reached USD 30 billion in 2005, and its growth rate is still high. The two countries are planning to reach 60 billion turnover by 2008-2010. Trade with other East Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea and, of course, Mongolia, is also undergoing quantitative and qualitative changes.

Russia will eventually become a WTO member. This might serve as an additional incentive for the change of Russo-Chinese trade structure, as well as of the shift of Russia's trade with other NEA nations. Russia may become not only a supplier of raw materials and exporter of military production, but also an important partner in investment and high-tech cooperation. On the other hand, WTO membership will induce a painful and difficult period of adaptation of Russia's economy to new trade and liberalization rules. More or less, the adaptation process has been already experienced by other NEA nations, while Russia is only at the beginning of the adaptation.

Energy component

For Russia, the NEA region is one of the most important consumers of Siberian energy carriers – oil, natural gas, and electric energy in future. “Energy diplomacy” occupies a key position in the foreign policy of Russia. While expanding its energy exports to the West, Russia should simultaneously expand its energy export to the East. Today's “energy accent” on Europe is not advantageous for Russia. Russia is interested in diversification of its energy exports and in the opening of a great energy “window” to East Asia as well. This might smoothe the existing imbalance between Western and Eastern vectors of Russia's energy policy.

As for security issues, one should emphasize that Russia, while developing the Eastern vector of its energy policy, also creates additional elements for energy stability in Asia-Pacific. The accomplishment of Russian energy projects will help China, Japan, and South Korea cover their energy deficits, maintain stability and advance evolution of these countries' economies. In particular, the Sakhalin projects, Kovykta natural gas project, Taishet-Nakhodka (with Daqing branch) oil project and others are most relevant.

Intra-Russian regional component

Development of Russia's ties with other NEA countries gives Siberia and the Russian Far East new opportunities for their economic progress and integration. At the same time, intensive co-development of Siberian regions, Russian Far East and frontier regions of Mongolia and China is taking place. Nevertheless, some negative trends also occur. The danger of ecological and technogenic disasters keeps growing. The pollution of the Amur and Sungari rivers at the end of 2005 demonstrates how much Russian neighbouring territories may suffer because of the industrial development of China's frontier provinces. These same problems may appear in the future at other sectors of the Russo-Chinese border. In addition, the prospect of technogenic and ecological disasters may affect all NEA countries.

Political components related to the problem of regional collective security.

Russia carries out a policy of security and status-quo maintenance in the region. This policy is based on exclusively peaceful and political means for the settlement of conflicts which now exist in the region. Primarily, this refers to the North Korea's nuclear crisis. Regretfully, the Six-Party Talks in their current paradigm have come to a stalemate. At the beginning of February 2006, bilateral Japanese-North Korean talks took place in Beijing. The talks brought no positive result. One may state, that political resources of China, Japan and Russia in the advancement of the six-sided talks are coming to an end. It is possible that there are some opportunities for South Korean policy to involve North Korea in closer contact through the development of direct reciprocal ties between North and South Korea. That is an important task which should be independently pursued by Seoul, especially if Seoul expands economic assistance to the North. Another resource, which is not in active use now, is represented by the normalization of bilateral USA-DPRK relations. Washington should realize that

the Kim Jong-Il regime will exist for a long time and agreements will have to be reached with the regime. It seems possible, that Russia might use its facilities to organize meetings of Russian and North Korean researchers in Vladivostok. But now it is difficult to do due to the reluctance of Pyongyang. In order to take part in such meetings, North Korean scholars need to get permission of high authorities – and so far such permission has not been forthcoming.

In light of these factors, experts face the question: Can the Six-Party Talks lead to final settlement of the North Korean crisis, and can the pattern turn into a strategic Forum and a new security structure in NEA in the future? There is no answer to the question yet. The future collective security structure in NEA should be based on compromise and consensus among all states irrespective of their territorial dimensions and political weight. In NEA there are various approaches and views among experts concerning the security architectonics in the region. The European security pattern (Conference on Security), as we know, was not adopted by NEA. The main role here is played by bilateral and trilateral treaties on security, based on the collaboration with the USA (for example, the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and others). On the other hand, there is the useful experience of the ASEAN Regional Forum and its tactful preventive diplomacy, which, to a certain extent, could be utilized in NEA. At the same time, there is also the helpful experience of Mongolia, while carrying out independent foreign policy, also participates in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as an observer. The SCO unites four Central Asian nations, Russia and China. Meanwhile, Mongolia maintains excellent relations with the USA, as evidenced by the 2006 visit of President Bush to Mongolia and by the signing of bilateral agreements on military and economic cooperation.

Political components related to Russia's interests in its bilateral relations with the NEA states.

The Chinese factor for Russia

China is the principal strategic partner of Russia in NEA. The state of the strategic partnership between Russia and China is fixed by the Grand Treaty of 2001. In March 2006, the visit of President Putin to China took place. The visit signified official commencement of the Year of Russia in the PRC. This year – is the Year of China in Russia. Both parties have worked on upgrading their strategic partnership, with main actors from the political and business elites of Russia and China, down to the level of broad civil masses and peoples. The

task is to make the partnership reach every inhabitant of our two countries through political, economic and cultural interaction and “people’s diplomacy”. Speaking in terms of a proverb, the task is to turn the current pattern – “hot at the top and cold at the bottom” into a new pattern – “hot at the top and hot at the bottom”.

The Japanese factor for Russia

The relations between Russia and Japan are restrained because of the absence of bilateral peace treaty. Nowadays, the energy factor may become an additional incentive for economic cooperation. Moscow and Tokyo are developing important energy projects – especially the Sakhalin projects. The construction of the Pacific oil pipeline is another significant project, and will provide transportation of oil from Eastern Siberia to the Pacific coast. A positive “breakout” in the Russo-Japanese relations may sharply intensify the geopolitical and economic situation in NEA. Eventually, this will serve the interests of both Russia and Japan. In the future, Japan could become a locomotive of investment activities in the Russian Far East.

The Mongolian Factor

Russia-Mongolia relations have taken on new characteristics in the post-Soviet era. Mongolia is no more a “junior brother” and is not a “satellite” of Russia, but an independent and equal partner. Obviously, in the Russo-Mongolian relationship the main economic “burden” falls on ties between neighbouring frontier regions of Russia and Mongolia. This fact objectively increases the autonomous political role of Russian federal territories, such as Buryat Republic, Irkutsk region, Tyva and others, which have common borders with Mongolia. The annulment by Russia of the Mongolian debt to the former USSR has also become an additional factor in improving the overall climate of Moscow-Ulaanbaatar relations. As for the security aspect, Mongolia ceased to be a “hostage” of Russo-Chinese relations. In fact, besides two traditional foreign policy priorities (Russia and China), today Mongolia has third external priority – the West. These three external “footholds” make Mongolia’s regional position well-balanced and stable. For Russia, the rapprochement of Mongolia with the SCO is an undoubtedly positive determinant.

Key vectors in Northeast Asia

Thus, while characterizing NEA as a carrier of an overall security structure, one should distinguish following key vectors.

First vector: USA-NEA

In a concentrated manner the aim of the USA is to preserve American leadership both in the NEA region and in the Asia-Pacific as a whole. First of all, Washington seeks to preserve its leadership in the security field through playing a role of a regional security actor in bilateral and multilateral levels. The USA is objectively interested in the preservation of the old structure of bilateral and trilateral treaties, constituted during the “cold war” period.

Second vector: Japan - NEA

The aim of Japan in the context of the Japanese-American coalition is to achieve equal political partnership with the USA. The discussion in Japan on the revision of its Constitution (including Article 9) is ongoing. It is difficult to say how soon complete cancellation or amendment of the Article may happen. But it seems that the consensus to make relevant constitutional changes already exists in the Japanese society. On the other hand, the amendment of the Japanese Constitution may lead to a quantitative growth of Japan’s armed forces, including nuclear missile development.

Third vector: China-NEA

In the realization of its regional policy the PRC stands on the well-known doctrine of the “peaceful empowerment” of China. It means that China actively positions itself as a global power, which erects its relations’ system having acquired a new status - the status of a power responsible for the whole world’s fate and for the development in the region in particular. In this sense, the role of China has shown qualitative growth on bilateral and multilateral levels. One may concisely present China’s foreign targets as achievement of the world multipolarity, acquisition of new energy resources and early reunification of the country.

Fourth vector: Russia - NEA

The accomplishment of Russian economic reforms and/or the threat of their failure may profoundly influence Russia’s regional strategy. As NEA nations are being involved in the regional integration processes with different

intensity, Russia has an opportunity to find its own “niche” in North-East Asia (as China and - even earlier - Japan did).

Therefore, in the context of the twenty-first century’s new global agenda, one may say that Russia, China, Japan, South Korea and Mongolia are greatly interdependent and interrelated. This interdependence is imposed by the similarity of economic and security challenges facing the NEA nations.